



## Summary

The salting and smoking of meat was an ancient practice even before the birth of Christ. These early processed meat products were prepared for one purpose, their preservation for use at some future time. Salt was used at concentrations high enough to preserve the meat. Preservation by smoking is believed to have been developed inadequately by the primitive tribes. The American Indians preserved meat prior to settlement by Europeans by hanging it in the top of a teepee to maximize contact with campfire smoke.

The origin of the use of nitrite is lost in history. Salt containing saltpeter (nitrates) was used in Homer's time (850 B.C.) to preserve meat. Nitrate was present originally as a natural impurity in the salts used in curing but, unknown to the users, was a key ingredient in the curing process. The Romans, who learned the art of curing meat with salt from the Greeks, were the first to note the reddening effect now attributed to nitrite. Although the role of nitrites in cured meat was not really understood until early in the 20th century, it is clear that for thousands of years



nitrite has played an important role in meat curing. Recognition of the value of sodium nitrate in producing an attractive colour may well have been due to adventitious impurities in the sodium chloride employed. Therefore, a more modern definition of meat curing could be the addition of salt and nitrate/nitrite to meat that produces the colour and flavor we associate with cured meats. The first dry cure meat products were probably inferior by today's standards. Scientific principles of curing meats were not applied until the latter part of the nineteenth century when the growing meat packing industry began to search for ways to improve quality. With the successful advent of refrigeration, curing of meats evolved from being a means of preserving meat to a fantastically complex and diverse segment of the meat industry, which should continue to provide a unique and diversified variety in the food supply.